

Because You Are Young

A Topical Sermon

by Neale Pryor

What a privilege it is to be young! Aren't you glad you are young? With your whole life before you, youth is an exciting time, isn't it? George Bernard Shaw once said that youth is such a wonderful thing, it is a shame that it has to be wasted on young people.

Because you are young, you are a very important part of the world and the church right now. It seems that we older people are making much out of what you are going to be *some day*. You are going to be something great *some day*, but you are something right now. You are the leaders of tomorrow, but you are the inspiration and hope of many of us right now. There are things that only you can do today. There is work in the church that only young people can do. If they don't do it, it will not be done. Sometimes you may get the impression that we are saying to you, "Just sit right there and be still. When you get to be 30, we may call on you." Nothing could be further from the truth. We need you now. You are important right now!

Because you are young, you will be of even greater importance to the Lord's kingdom in years to come. You will be facing trials and overcoming problems that the older generation never faced and never will attempt to solve. Because you are young, there is much demanded of you, and even more will be demanded of you in the days to come. In order for you to meet these challenges you will need three things: (1) a faith to live by, (2) a self to live with, and (3) a purpose to live for.

I. A FAITH TO LIVE BY

Nothing could be more important than a strong foundation. Your ability to endure and amount to something depends upon your foundation. The deeper your foundation, the higher you can build. The huge skyscrapers in New York City are possible because they have a deep, solid foundation in rock underground. If they could not lay such a strong foundation, they would not be able to construct such tall

buildings.

Harding University constructed a building in the 1960s. For the first several months it looked as if the workmen were doing nothing. In fact, it seemed so strange that an announcement was made in chapel about it. The workmen discovered that many feet below the ground level there was a bed of rock. They were digging down to this rock and laying concrete piers for a foundation. That building will probably be around long after many others are gone.

In the parable of the two builders, Jesus contrasted the man who laid the foundation of his house on the sand with the man who laid his foundation upon the rock. In Luke's account Jesus pointed out the extent to which the builder went in laying this foundation: he "dugged and went deep and laid a foundation upon the rock" (Luke 6:48). When the rains came and the winds blew and beat against it, it did not fall, for it was founded upon the rock. Of course the house on the sand fell. It was, no doubt, just as good a house, but it was laid upon a poor foundation. How important it is for us to build the only lives we will ever have upon the right foundation!

In the parable of the sower, Jesus told of some seed that fell upon the stony ground. Some may think that this is ground that has huge rocks in it, but it is ground that has a thin layer of topsoil over a layer of rock. The little plants wither and die because they have no depth. Lives without depth cannot last.

All of these illustrations point out the importance of a deep and abiding foundation. Lives must have a solid foundation if they are to endure and produce fruit.

That solid foundation is your faith to live by. So many young people drift aimlessly because they have no real center for their lives. The strings of a violin cannot make music until they are tied down at both ends. Loose strings cannot play. Neither can loose lives be successful.

Because you are young, it is time that you find that faith to live by. What are you going to

base your life upon? What in this world is worth giving your all? What standards are you going to live by? What goals in life are worth striving for? This is a decision that only you can make. No one should, or can, make it for you.

Often parents will ask me what has happened to their children. The children were faithful to attend church and do all of the right things until they were about 16. Then they seemed to lose all interest in the church. They did not suddenly become sour at 16. When they were younger, the children were going on the faith of their parents. Now the time has arrived when they must stand on their own faith. We cannot live all of our lives on our parents' faith. God does not have any grandchildren. We may inherit our parents' physical build, brown eyes, blond hair (or lack of hair), but we cannot inherit their faith. That is something that we must get for ourselves.

When I was a little fellow I believed in Santa Claus. I believed in him because my mother and father told me there was a Santa Claus. Seeing what all I got Christmas morning, it would have been foolish to question any further! But when I became older, I began to ask myself if there really was a Santa Claus. The fact that Mother and Daddy told me so was not enough. I needed to find out for myself.

When I was very young I believed in God. I believed in him because my parents told me about Him. The preacher and my Sunday school teacher said that there was a God. But when I got older that was not enough. I needed to find for myself reasons for believing in God.

A faith that has seriously questioned itself and found for itself reasons to believe is much healthier than one that has never tried to find for itself the answers. Because you are young, you need to ask for yourself if you should believe in God, if you should accept the Bible as God's word. Remember the words of the Samaritan people to the woman, "Now we believe, not because of thy speaking: for we have heard for ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world" (John 4:42).

Do not be afraid to search for the truth. Do not be afraid to probe into your faith for reasons for believing. If what you believe is the truth, the more you investigate, the more it will shine forth. Like an old brass door knob, the more you

rub it, the more it shines. I would not want to have a faith that I feared to investigate. Too much of the *right* learning cannot hurt anyone.

I have had students come into my office looking rather embarrassed. They ask me timidly, "Please don't get upset with me, but how can I really know that there is a God? How can I know for sure that the Bible is God's word?"

Usually I reply, "Well, I am glad that you are finally asking. That is wonderful that you are seeking out these answers for yourself." Everyone must make this struggle for himself. Christianity is a personal relationship with Jesus. Each one must find God himself. A second hand faith is not worth much. Because you are young, you need to find Christ for yourself. You need to be convinced in your own mind of the truth of His revelation.

I cannot believe for you any more than I can obey for you. Christianity is a lonely thing. Most of serving the Lord is an individual thing. You have to face your own temptations. You have to obey for yourself. You will have to die by yourself. You will stand in judgment by yourself. You will have to believe for yourself. A faith that is internalized and personalized is one that will endure.

There are many reasons why we should believe there is a God. The creation itself is one of the greatest. Often when I ask myself, "How can I really know there is a God and a purpose to my existence?" I look around me. There must be a God to have made such a beautiful world. Look at the sun, moon, and stars. Look at the green grass, blue skies, and flowers around you. Consider the delicate balances of nature: the right temperatures, the right supply of oxygen and carbon dioxide. Look at the marvel of the human body. There are processes going on inside of you that even the greatest minds do not understand today. If scientists can create life in a test tube, it will not be an accident. It will be the result of years of research and study. Even then, they would be a far cry from the simplest living organisms, not to speak of the human body. The psalmist long ago echoed my sentiments when he said, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14) and "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork" (Psalm 19:1). The heavens do not have to keep saying, "God made me. God made

me.” Their very existence is sufficient to show evidence of their Creator. Note verse 3 of Psalm 19: “There is no speech nor language; their voice is not heard,” yet “their line is gone out through all the earth” (v. 4). Paul said that the Gentiles should have known of God through the creation: “The creator of the world is clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity” (Romans 1:20). There is evidence of a God if we open our eyes and look.

Some have the opinion that it is unscientific to believe in God. But it is more reasonable to believe in God than not to believe in Him. Is it not easier to believe in a Creator who made the worlds than to believe that all of this is the result of chance? It takes a greater “leap of faith” to believe that matter always was and that all of this great universe just happened than it does to believe that an all-powerful and all-wise God made the worlds. You see, Christians are not the only ones who have a faith. Everyone has a faith: a faith that there is a God or a faith that there is not a God.

We are sort of detectives in this world, looking for clues of life. When a detective investigates a crime, he puts forth certain possible solutions. Then he asks which possibility is most likely, which solution has the fewest problems. As we search, we ask which alternative to the origin of the universe is the most likely, which solution presents the fewest problems. The answer in the Bible is the most reasonable: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). There is plenty of evidence to find a faith to live by.

II. A SELF TO LIVE WITH

Because you are young, you need a self to live with. You are going to have to live with yourself for the next fifty, seventy, or eighty years. You need to spend that time with someone you like.

Some people don’t like themselves. They are miserable. They take trips seeking happiness and are just as miserable there as they were at home. Do you know why? Because they take the source of their misery with them. And I don’t mean their wives. I mean themselves.

We should love ourselves. The Bible teaches self-love. Self-love is not the same thing as con-

ceit. Most conceited persons really don’t have much genuine self-love; they are quite insecure and don’t have a good opinion of themselves. That is why they put up the front of conceit. A person who really feels good about himself is open to others; he does not try to make others feel inferior. Really, self-love is the opposite of conceit.

Jesus commanded self-love. When He told us to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:39), that isn’t saying much for our neighbor if we don’t care for ourselves, is it? Paul encouraged husbands to love their wives by saying, “He that loveth his own wife loveth himself” (Ephesians 5:28). Each one of us is worth something; we are worth loving. God made us; that gives us value. One person put it this way: “I am worth something because God made me, and God doesn’t make junk!”

In order to have a self to live with, there are at least three things we need to do. *First*, we need to avoid having a life filled with bitter memories and regrets. Too many older people have so many regrets to haunt them in their latter years. Many would give anything they would have if they could relive some of their days and avoid the painful mistakes they made in their youth.

Paul is an example of this. How do you suppose he felt when he went to church at Jerusalem and saw little children whose parents he had killed? Or spoke to some widow and remembered the day he beat her husband to death? Or talked with some crippled man who was lamed when he was beaten by Saul the persecutor? It would be hard to live that down, wouldn’t it? It seems that Paul never completely got over what he did in his past. About twenty years after his conversion he said, “For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God” (1□Corinthians 15:9).

Paul, like any other Christian, was forgiven the guilt of these sins. Still, the memory and consequences of these mistakes stayed with him throughout his life. There must have been times when this great man wept over his past life; he did everything possible to erase those terrible crimes. But what was done, was done; nothing could erase it. Now we should not wallow in self pity over our mistakes. We could just lie down and do nothing the rest of our lives because of

our terrible guilt. We must realize that the blood of Jesus can wash away any sin. We have to pick up the pieces and go on. Remember what Paul said: "Forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on. . . ." (Philippians 3:13, 14).

Because you are young, you don't have many bitter memories yet. It is far easier never to make these mistakes than it is to try to undo what has already been done. Resolve to keep your life free of these regrets. You may be able to pull a nail out of a board, but the scar remains. Keep your past from being scarred. Don't do things now that you will regret the rest of your life.

This is particularly true in the area of boy/girl relationships. So many young men and women have deep regrets and often emotional scars because of intimacy before marriage. I have talked with many in my office. I recall girls wanting to know if they can ever get married after what they have done. I remember one girl screaming, "I hate him! I hate him!" Of course she was a willing partner and was as much to blame as he was. I wanted to reach back in the past and pull out that mistake, but I couldn't. And neither could anyone else. What has been done may be forgiven—you can thank the blood of Jesus for that. Still the memories and regrets, and often the consequences, will haunt these young people for the rest of their lives.

This problem is not restricted to the girls alone. Boys have just as much a need to keep themselves pure as do the young ladies. I recall a young man weeping over the mistake he had made one weekend he was away from school. I reached down and handed to him the box of tissue that I keep for the girls who come to see me. He and I prayed that his first mistake would also be his last one.

There are very few young people who will not later regret intimacy before marriage. It will be hard to find an older person who would not recommend waiting until after marriage for such intimacy. I can almost guarantee that you one day will regret your actions. At the moment it may not seem like such a big thing. But you are creating memories that will remain for your life. You are doing something that one day you will give nearly anything to erase from your past.

Boys, for the sake of the girl you are with, for the sake of your parents and for hers, for the

sake of the girl you one day will marry, for the sake of the boy one day she will marry, for the children you will have, for the children one day she will have—keep yourself pure. What you are doing affects far more than just the two of you.

There is hardly anything that will enhance your wedding day more than the clear conscience that you are a virgin. There is perhaps nothing more delightful for a honeymoon than the purity of the two. What should you bring to your wedding? Many things, perhaps. One of the most important is a pure conscience and a clean past.

Secondly, to have a self to live with, you need to accept yourself as you are. Very few of us are just what we want to be. Some wish they were taller; some wish they were shorter. Some want to be heavier; some, thinner. Some want to have blond hair; some want curly hair. Some would just settle for hair! No one is exactly like he wants to be. I have always wished that I had been smarter instead of so good looking. But we have to make the best of what we have.

When God made us, He did not ask us how we wanted to look. We would have suggested several changes. Our friends would have made even more suggestions. We must learn to accept what we have and make the best of it.

Paul wished that he did not have a thorn in the flesh. No one knows what was this thorn in the flesh. It may have been poor eye sight; it could have been a hundred other things. It does seem to have been some physical problem or shortcoming. Paul prayed to the Lord to remove it. God answered his prayer, not by removing it, but by giving him the strength to bear it. He had to learn to accept it (2 Corinthians 12:7–10).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told His disciples to learn to accept what they cannot change. He asked them, "And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit unto the measure of his life?" (Matthew 6:27). In other words, can you live any longer by worrying about it? Another reading of this verse says, "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?" (KJV). A cubit is supposed to be the length from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger, 18 inches. Measure yourself and see if you are 18 inches. If not, worry about it—you are not normal! Do you suppose that by worrying about it you would grow 18 inches taller? How foolish

it is to waste our time and energy worrying over what cannot be helped. We have two alternatives. One, we can worry and fret over our shortcomings and make ourselves and everyone around us miserable. Two, we can accept ourselves for what we are and go ahead with the business of living. We need to live up to the words of that familiar prayer, "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change."

Really, the things that are so important to teenagers, such as looks and physique, are not all that important in the later years. It is of the utmost importance to young girls to be attractive in order to find a boy friend and eventually a good husband. To young men, it is of the greatest importance to be physically desirable, to be an athlete, if they are ever going to impress the girls. The worst word in the English language must be *ugly*. Call me dumb, call me slow, call me whatever you wish—but don't call me ugly.

One of these days, girls, that beautiful head of hair on that young man will turn gray, or even worse, turn loose. That powerful chest will one day drop a few inches and collect around the waistline. And, boys, some of those girls won't fare much better either. These attributes of physical attractiveness will be erased as time takes its toll.

You cannot afford to put all of your eggs in one basket. If you depend on the outward beauty alone, your life will be over shortly after 35. There may have been many factors leading to the suicide of Marilyn Monroe at the age of 36. I feel that one may have been the realization that she would not be beautiful forever. That was her sole claim to fame, and that would soon be gone. What else was there to live for? Peter advised the women: "Whose adorning let it not be the outward adorning of braiding the hair, and of wearing jewels of gold, or of putting on apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in the incorruptible apparel of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (1 Peter 3:3, 4).

Many of us will never win acclaim over our outward appearance; Mother Nature has seen to that. But there is something that all of us can do to develop an inward beauty. That beauty not only outlasts the outward, but it outshines it. If you don't make it in life, it will not be because

of what is on the outside; it will be because of what is on the inside.

There was a young girl who attended Harding a number of years ago. When I first saw her, I thought to myself, "You are the ugliest girl in school. If we are having a contest for the ugliest girl, you have won." We had some pretty bad ones that year, but she seemed to top them all. Her second semester here, she enrolled in my class. I looked at her, and she looked at me for five days a week. By the end of the semester she did not seem unattractive to me. There were many girls in school for whom I felt more pity than I did for her. She had not had plastic surgery, and I had not had my glasses changed. She was a beautiful lady.

Some call this experience "bearing acquaintance." How often have you seen someone you thought was nice looking and then, as you came to know him, he became less and less attractive? On the other hand, how many have you not noticed at first, but as you were around them more, they seemed to grow more attractive? That is the beauty of soul, a beauty within the reach of every one of us.

Thirdly, in order to have a self to live with, you need to find what you can do in life and do it to the best of your ability. Many are miserable because they are trying to be what they are not. We are all members of the body. The members of the body should not and do not try to do the same thing. Can you imagine the frustration of an eye trying to hear? Can you picture a man going to the doctor and saying, "Doc, I wish you would look at my eye." After the examination the doctor says that he can find nothing wrong with it, and the man replies, "I can't hear a thing out of it."

How many frustrated people we have today who are trying to be what they are not. It is important for you to learn what you can and cannot do. What part of the body are you? If you are an eye, then get to seeing. Maybe you are just an intestine or a part of the liver—someone in a less noticeable position. These parts are just as important. You seldom hear a boy talking about how great his girl friend's spleen or liver is. He tells about her hair, teeth, etc. But you let that spleen or liver get in trouble, and suddenly she is not interested in that curly hair or those pearly teeth. Everyone's job is important.

Take pride in what you are doing. We can feel good about ourselves when we are doing well that which we have the talent to do. Be the best of what you can be. One of the greatest compliments ever paid Jesus was the one given by outsiders after He had healed a deaf mute. They exclaimed, "He hath done all things well; he maketh even the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak" (Mark 7:37). "He hath done all things well." Can that be said of you? There are many times that you can get by with less than your best. But you owe it to yourself, even if to no other, to give it your best. You know when you have given your all. There is no greater feeling than the satisfaction of a job well done. That is one step in developing a self to live with.

There is not anyone else in the world quite like you. You are not someone else, and you should not ever try to be someone else. There are qualities in others that you might like to copy in your life, but you should be proud of your unique qualities that make you. If you are going to be an imitation of another, you will never be anything more than an imitation. Be the real thing. Be you. God has endowed you with a certain combination of talents and qualities that no one else will ever have. Don't fret because you are not someone else. Be yourself and be proud of it.

III. A PURPOSE TO LIVE FOR

A story is told of a man speaking to some people in a mental institution and beginning his talk with the rhetorical question "Why are we all here?" Of course, there was no reply. For emphasis, he repeated the question "Why are we all here?" A voice in the back responded, "Because we are not all there."

Ask this question, "Why are we all here?" I hope the answer is not the one the man received. Really, there are three basic questions you must answer: (1) Where did I come from? (2) What am I doing here? (3) Where am I going? Some would have you to believe that you came from lower forms of life through a process of evolution, that you are on this earth taking up space and using up commodities, and that you are going back to the dust from which you came. The Bible teaches that you came from the hand of God, that you are on this earth to serve your Maker and fellow man, and that you are going

into one of two vast eternities.

If the second set of answers is true, it makes a lot of difference as to what is your purpose in life. If the first set of answers is true, then it really doesn't matter all that much. God is telling you that it does matter—it matters a whole lot!

Because you are young, you need to have the right purpose in life. It is more important right now in what direction you are headed than where you are on the road. Your direction today will determine your destination forty or fifty years from now—or a billion years from now.

It is easy to get distracted between the important and the essential. Often the things nearest to us look the largest. You can put your hand over your eye, and the hand appears to be larger than the whole world. Pressures of the moment are often blown entirely out of proportion while long range goals, though more important by far, don't seem too important. Too many seem to be suffering from spiritual myopia. Myopia is nearsightedness. The nearsighted person can see clearly what is close to him, but he cannot see in the distance. His whole world is the few feet around him. Glasses and contact lenses can correct this problem physically. But spiritual nearsightedness is often much harder to deal with. Peter spoke of such. After listing the Christian graces (or virtues), he said, "For he that lacketh these things is blind, seeing only what is near, . . ." (2 Peter 1:9).

There is a saying in school—"majoring in minors." Students often come to college and get caught up in the minor things of college life—the athletic, the social aspects. Then when they get their grades, they see that they have not been giving the attention to the more important aspects of an education.

In Philippians 1:10 Paul prayed that the brethren might "approve the things that are excellent." Literally this means "distinguish the things that differ." In other words, separate the important from the less important. Or to put it another way, major in majors.

To Paul there was only one major purpose in life. He said, "For to this end we labor and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, . . ." (1 Timothy 4:10). Paul was a specialist. This is the age of specialization. We seldom go to just a doctor anymore; we go to a specialist. I heard of one man who went to an ear specialist. The

specialist said that he could not help him because he was a right ear specialist, and the man's left ear was giving him trouble. In many areas of life we see the value of specialization. We have to specialize if we are going to achieve excellence. We cannot be and do everything. Paul summed up his purpose with the words "... but one thing I do, ..." (Philippians 3:13). There were many things that Paul did in life, but they all were centered on this one purpose of serving God.

You are a Christian by profession. Whatever else you do should be determined by your commitment to Christ. This one thing should determine your lifetime work, your choice of friends and associates, your hobbies and recreation, your choice of a husband or wife. We are soldiers of Christ. "No soldier on service entangleth himself in the affairs of everyday life; ..." (2 Timothy 2:4). What would you think of a soldier who was so busy with his hobby that he did not have time to go to battle? We are soldiers of Christ first, and anything else second.

To me the most important verse in the entire New Testament is Matthew 16:26. If I could burn in the minds and hearts of young people one verse, that would be it. It puts life in perspective. Jesus asked, "For what shall a man be profited, if he gain the whole world, and forfeit his life?" If you reach every goal in life you set and lose your soul, you are a miserable failure. I hope that you get that education you want, that you find that husband or wife you seek, that you achieve the success you dream of. But remem-

ber, if you lose your soul, it would be better for you if you had never been born. And when you stand before the judgment, you will wish that you had never been born!

A young man was telling his father about his plans for the future. He had picked out his college and had already decided on his major. His father asked him, "And what then?"

He replied that he was going to get a good job and be a success in his chosen field of endeavor. His father asked again, "And what then?"

He said that he planned to get married and have a good family, three or four children. His father asked again, "And what then?"

He hadn't planned on that many "what then's." He said, "Well, I guess I will get old. Everyone else does."

His father persisted, "And what then?"

He said, "I guess some day I will die. Everyone else does."

Once more his father asked, "And what then?"

Have you ever given thought to that final question? When this world is no more, when the Lord has come to claim His own, when the last battle has been fought, and the last dollar earned—"What then?"

CONCLUSION

It is great to be young. May God bless you every one. But may you find in your youth, perhaps even today: (1) faith to live by, (2) a self to live with, and (3) a purpose to live for.